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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000468

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR BASE NEGOTIATIONS

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FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1. (U) This is an action cable.

SUMMARY

2. (C) Groundwork must be laid to ensure the upcoming round of lease negotiations transpire as smoothly as possible. To this end, U.S. Embassy Djibouti proposes to hold a coordination meeting between French forces in Djibouti (FFDJ) and MARCENT Djibouti (MDJ) to pave the way for future lease negotiations. Additionally, we ask that U.S. Embassy Djibouti be allowed to announce lease negotiations to the Government of Djibouti via diplomatic note when all parties concerned are prepared to proceed.

Good Neighbors

3. (C) Currently, other than Camp Lemonier, no other military facilities exist on the South side of Ambouli International Airport. MDJ wishes to acquire land to the East and access to the sea in order to facilitate required expansion plans. The commander of FFDJ, MG Gerard Pons, has informally shared on several occasions with the Embassy and with Commander of CJTF-HOA an FFDJ desire for future construction plans on the south side of the runway. From discussions with both MDJ and FFDJ it appears that both parties should be able to accomplish their respective expansion projects. However, to preserve the current goodwill and prevent future conflict, both parties should conduct a meeting soon to lay out exact requirements and space needs of each side. U.S. Embassy Djibouti is willing to host such a meeting during the planned April 25-27 trip to Djibouti by the OSD, Joint Staff, and CENTCOM. Such a meeting will clear the air, dispel any suspicions and put the USG in a good position prior to the renegotiation of the Base Access Agreement for Camp Lemonier.

Facilitating Communication

4. (C) When the decision is made to move forward with new lease negotiations, we propose that the USG inform the Djiboutian government via diplomatic note from this Embassy. While we hold no illusions that this will ensure all relevant parties coordinate and collaborate within the Djiboutian government, it will put us on the high ground here in Djibouti when confronted by members of the DJG who claim to have been "cut out" of the process.

5. (C) We have not been notified officially by the Djiboutian government who will negotiate for Djibouti in the next round of negotiations for Camp Lemonier. However, it is a safe assumption that it will be Ambassador Olhaye in Washington, D.C. It is also no secret among the Djibouti watchers that Ambassador Olhaye is not well liked by other senior members of the Djiboutian MFA or military. As has been noted in past cables, the current lease for Camp Lemonier caused discontent amongst Djiboutian military members when it was discovered that their air base (otherwise known as the presidential hangar) had been, in their view, "given away." Notifying the DJG via diplomatic note from this Embassy will make clear to all concerned that there is no intention on our part to hide the process from anyone.
RAGSDALE